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ABSTRACT

Based on a review of research, the most common syntactic errors made by native Arabic-speaking learners of English as a second language are discussed. Seven categories of error are distinguished and described: verbal errors (use of tense, phase, aspect, voice, verb formation, concord, finite/non-finite verbs); relative clauses (interlingual and intralingual errors, structural misrepresentation, simplification); adverbial clauses (comparison, purpose, result, concession, manner); sentence structure; articles (definite and indefinite); prepositions (deletion, substitution, redundancy); and conjunctions. It is concluded that most common source of error is the influence of the native language, and that in processing English syntactic structures, Arabic speakers adopt certain strategies similar to those of first-language learners, including simplification and overgeneralization. Contains 52 references. (MSE)

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ENGLISH SYNTACTIC ERRORS BY ARABIC SPEAKING LEARNERS: REVIEWED

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0. Introduction

In recent years, applied linguists have been much concerned with the description of linguistic behaviour of the L2 learners labelled as deviant or error. In particular, a technique known as error analysis has been developed by means of which it is claimed access is gained to the transitional competence of the L2 learner thus making the description of the learner's interlanguage and the explanation of the systematic nature of the errors generated by its grammar possible. Such a technique, it seems, plays an important role in understanding the processes that underlies SLA. It figures out statistically the troublesome linguistic areas L2 learner encounters while learning English. These troublesome linguistic areas or errors for short are an inevitable part of the process of SLA. They provide valuable feedback to both teachers and learners regarding learner strategies and progress. They also provide researchers with insights into the nature of the SLA process itself.

The aim of the present paper, by reviewing the studies available is to demonstrate the most general types of syntactic errors Arabic speaking learners encounter in learning English as a foreign language. These types of errors will be presented in the following seven divisions: verbal errors, relative clauses, adverbial clauses, sentence structure, articles, prepositions, and conjunctions.

1. VERBAL ERRORS

Morphological and inflectional errors, which seem to be characteristic of most EFL learners (see Richards, 1971), are excluded here. Errors in the use of tense, phase, aspect, voice, verb-formation, concord, and finite and non-finite verbs will be discussed in this paper.

1.1 *Tense*

Three types were recorded in the literature: tense sequence, tense substitution, and tense marker deletion.

1.1.1 *Tense sequence:*

The literature reported that Arabic speaking learners of English may use present simple with past simple tenses particularly with compound and complex sentences (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Kambal, 1980; El-Badarin, 1982; El-Sayed, 1983):

[1] *They came late yesterday and go directly to the hall.

One can argue here that the error in tense sequence may not be a negative transfer from the mother tongue (MT) since Arabic[1] requires that the same tense be used across such sentences.

1.1.2 *Tense substitution:*

Arabic speaking learners may use simple past tense instead of the simple present (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Mukattash, 1978, 1986; Kambal, 1980; El-Badarin, 1982; El-Sayed, 1983; Meziani, 1984):

[2] *The sun rose from the east.

Or they may use the simple present instead of the simple past (Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Al-Muarik, 1982; Meziani, 1984):

[3] * Yesterday I has a party that's why the house is in a mess.

The errors instanced in [2] and [3] above, which were most noticeable in compound and complex sentences, seem unlikely to be due to negative transfer from Arabic. Indeed, the linguistic contexts of these examples do require the use of the simple present and the simple past, respectively, in Arabic as is the case in English.

1.1.3 *Tense marker deletion:*

Deletion of the auxiliary *have* or *has* in forming the present perfect was the most common error here (Kambal, 1980; El-Badarin, 1982):

[4] *He just gone to the market.

1.2 *Phase*

Arabic speaking learners use erroneously non-perfective instead of the perfective or avoid using it as a whole (Asfoor, 1978; Kambal, 1980; El-Badarin, 1982; Mukattash, 1986):

|5| *He didn't come until now.

One can admit here that the systems of time sense in the two languages concerned, i.e. English and Arabic, are very different (Al-Bouq, 1988). For example, Arabic has fewer restrictions on agreement between tenses across clauses than English. This means that it is normally acceptable in Arabic to switch from one tense to another, while in English a switching of this sort is considered a deviation. For example, the Arabic sentence /ra?aytuhu min qabl/ can be translated to mean: (1) 'I saw him before,' or 'I have seen him before.' This may explain the fact that the Arabic speaking learner is not restricted in his choice of verbs, as noted above, and, as a result, he tends to transfer into English the freedom of choice in this regard.

1.3 *Aspect*

The literature reported cases where Arab learners failed to use the progressive, and used instead the non-progressive (El-Badarin, 1982; Mukattash, 1986):

|6| *They aren't cause difficulties to us.

Mukattash (1986) maintains that his subjects (Arab EFL university students) "tended to use the progressive" in example |6| above "instead of the non-progressive" (p.193).

Asfoor (1978), however, found that some of his subjects (Ss) used the progressive aspect (*-ing*) of certain verbs instead of the present tense:

|7| *I am not understanding the lesson.

The errors in |6| and |7| above are examples of negative transfer from MT. While the verb 'cause' in |6| does not occur in the progressive aspect in Arabic, 'understand' in |7| is allowed to be used in the progressive aspect. Consider the following example:

|8| English: I understand my lesson today.
Arabic equivalent: /?naa faahim darsee al-yawm/
English translation: I'm understanding my lesson today.

In the English translation the Arabic verb /faahim/ is assigned to the form 'understanding' which is the progressive aspect of the verb 'understand' in English. Since this verb form is not allowed to be used in this aspect and context, the Arabic speaker is thus considered to be making an error as a result of violating this rule.

1.4 *Voice*

The Arabic speaking learners of English found active sentences less problematic than the passive ones. This let some of these learners avoid using the passive (Kleinmann, 1977; Schachter, 1979; El-Badarin, 1982). On the other hand, some studies reported two types of deviations these learners encounter while constructing the passive: (1) adding an appropriate (tensed) form of *be* but not adding the past participle form of the main verb (Kambal, 1980; Al-Muarik, 1982; El-Badarin, 1982; Schachter, 1992):

[9] *Oil was discover in the 19th century.

and (2) using the past participle form of the main verb, but no form of *be* is added (Kambal, 1980; Al-Muarik, 1982; El-Badarin, 1982; Mukattash, 1986; Schachter, 1992):

[10] *But when oil discovered in 1948 and began export it.

One can argue here that the error under discussion is due mainly to L1 influence: in Arabic the passive form is derived from the active form by means of internal vowel change (e.g. /shariba/ → /shuriba/ = drank → drunk).

1.5 *Verb-formation*

1.5.1 *Copula deletion:*

The most frequent type of deviation Arab speakers encounter in forming the English verb is the deletion of the copula (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Asfoor, 1978; Mukattash, 1978, 1986; Assubaiai, 1979; Beck, 1979; Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Kambal, 1980; Sharma, 1981; Al-Muarik, 1982; El-Badarin, 1982; Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983; Abu Ghararah, 1989):

[11] *You said you not tired.

[12] *He intelligent

All the studies mentioned above refer this type of deviation to MT interference since Arabic, as they claim, does not have copula. One can concede here that contrary to what these error analysts maintain, the verb *be* is available in the deep structure of the Arabic nominal sentences, such as these of [11] and [12] above, but not in the surface structure. Consider the following examples:

[13] a. Surface structure: Arabic sentence	/Talau	tilmithun	thakiyn/	
Literal English translation	Talal	pupil	clever	
b. Deep structure: Arabic	/yakuunu	Talalu	tilmithan	thakiyan/
Literal English translation	#is	Talal	pupil	clever#

The Arabic verb /yakuunu/ in [13b] above corresponds to the English verb *be* which does not appear in the surface structure of [13a]. This may let Arabic speakers, particularly those of low proficiency in English, not to use or delete the verb *be* from such English sentences.

1.5.2 *Auxiliary deletion:*

The auxiliary was deleted in four different types of sentences: (1) in simple sentences (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Willcott, 1974; Asfoor, 1978; Assubaiai, 1979; Beck, 1979; Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Al-Muanik, 1982; El-Badanin, 1982; El-Sayed, 1983; Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983):

[14] *They going to school now.

(2) in compound or complex sentences (Noor, 1987):

[15] *We punish him unless he works harder.

(3) in forming questions; whether *yes/no* (Asfoor, 1978):

[16] *You speak English?

or *wh-* ones (Asfoor, 1978; Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Mukattash, 1981; Abu Gharara, 1989):

[17] * What you want to drink.

and (4) in the passive form (cf. 1.4; Mukattash, 1986; Schachter, 1992):

[18] *The letter sent to Ahmed.

These types of errors can mainly be attributed to the influence of the MT (see the discussion in 1.5.1 above).

1.5.3 *Auxiliary redundancy:*

The auxiliary was used redundantly in both progressive aspect sentences (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Mukattash, 1986):

[19] *They are will be resting.

and in *wh*-questions (Kambal, 1980; Mukattash, 1981; Al-Muarik, 1982):

[20] *Which book did/do they have found?

One can argue here that the redundancy of the auxiliary can be traced back to a kind of false analogy where *do*, for example, is used redundantly alongside the auxiliary *have* as in [20] above.

1.5.4 *Auxiliary substitution:*

The auxiliary was erroneously substituted particularly in questions (Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Al-Muarik, 1982; Mukattash, 1981; Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983):

[21] *Where are you yesterday?

[22] *What does the group discussing?

1.5.5 *Mis form of the finite verb:*

Scott and Tucker (1974), Noor (1987), and Abu Ghararah (1989) reported that the Arabic speaking learners overgeneralize the *-ed* rule for the simple past (e.g., drived, catched).

The literature also shows cases where these learners use the infinitives instead of the *-ing* form after the copula (Scott & Tucker, 1974; El-Badarin, 1982):

[23] *He is put a ring on the bride finger.

Using the past participle instead of the infinitives after *to* was also reported in the literature (Scott & Tucker, 1974, Meziani, 1984):

[24] *Then they had to went down and tried to pushed it forward.

1.6 *Concord*

1.6.1 *Deletion of the third person singular marker:*

Many studies reported the deletion of the *-s* marker when the Arabic speaking learner uses the present simple (Beck, 1979; Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Sharma, 1981; Al-Muarik, 1982; El-Badarin, 1982; Tushyeh, 1988; Abu Ghararah, 1989):

[25] *He drink tea after dinner.

One can admit here that the deletion of *-s* cannot be explained simply in terms of negative transfer because in both varieties of Arabic, verbs are inflected for gender and number. This could be due, as Dusková (1969) maintains, to the fact that 'all grammatical persons take zero verbal ending except the third person singular in the present tense. The deletion of the *-s* in this structure may be accounted for by the heavy pressure of all the other endingless forms' (p. 20).

Moreover, El-Badarin (1982) reported that his Ss use redundantly the third person singular marker:

[26] *Jane and Mary likes to ski every winter.

This may mainly be attributed to hyper correction the learners follow with this structure.

1.6.2 *The incorrect form of be:*

The literature reported the following types of deviations in using the verb *be* (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Mukattash, 1978, 1986; Assubaiai, 1979,Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Kambal, 1980; Al-Muarik, 1982; El-Sayed, 1983):

a. *be* used at wrong place:

[27] *Last year was the bridge built.

b. wrong form of *be*:

[28] *He has setting in the garden now.

c. wrong form of *be* with plural subject:

[29] *They was excited.

d. *be* + verb stem for verb stem (past):

[30] *The thieves are steel some expensive watches from the shop.

e. *be* with verb stem (past):

[31] John was bought tobacco.

f. *be* + verb (past) for *be* + verb (participle):

[32] *Have you took your holiday yet?

1.7 *Finite, non-finite, and verbless clauses*

Arabic speaking learners tend to process English sentences with verbs (particularly finite) with less difficulty than those of no verbs (El-Badarin, 1983; Noor, 1991):

[33] finite: Yesterday he *went* fishing.

[34] non-finite: *Entering the house*, he tripped over the welcome mat.

[35] verbless: *Once in bed*, the children usually stay there.

This may mainly be due to the intrinsic difficulty to the English language since the absence of the verb (which is usually finite) from the sentence, or even changing the form of the verb to non-finite created difficulty for the learners even the native speakers of English (see Noor, 1991:338).

2. RELATIVE CLAUSES

The types of deviations the literature reported in using relative clauses can be classified into interlingual, intralingual, structural misrepresentation, and simplification. Each will be discussed in turn.

2.1 *Interlingual errors of relative clauses*

2.1.1 *Relative pronoun deletion:*

Arabic speaking learners of English tend to delete a relative pronoun in two contexts: (1) where the relative clause modifies a head-noun in the subject complement position (Mukattash, 1986):

[36] *There are many students attend the course.

and (2) where the relativized NP functions as a subject and where the head-noun is indefinite and functions as a direct object (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Schachter et al., 1976; Asfoor, 1978; Gass, 1979; Mukattash, 1986; Tushyeh, 1988):

[37] *I saw a man was looking for you.

Both errors in [36] and [37] above are caused by L1 interference: in Arabic context the occurrence of the relative pronoun is not possible (see Wright, 1967, vol.2:318; Salah, 1978). One should note here that the deletion of the relative pronoun by Arabic speaking learners has led some error-analysts to maintain plainly that Arabic has no relative pronouns (e.g., Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983).

Kharma (1987), however, reported that his Arabic speaking learners tend to use an English personal pronoun instead of, or sometimes in addition to, the relative pronoun, especially with prepositions:

[38] *My father is a merchant who (he) gives us all we need.

Here strategies of avoidance and simplification can be noticed (see also 2.4.1).

2.1.2 *The appearance of the resumptive pronoun in the relativized site:*

Arabic speaking learners were found users of the resumptive pronoun in the relative clause (Schachter, 1974; Scott & Tucker, 1974; Schachter et al., 1976; Ioup & Kruse, 1977; Asfoor, 1978; Gass, 1979; Mukattash, 1986; Kharma, 1987; Tushyeh, 1988):

[39] *This is the house which I live in *it*.

One can argue here that the error in [39] is a type of negative transfer from MT. A translation of the relative clause of [39] into Arabic is that /allathi ?skunu feehi/. In the Arabic context, the pronoun *it* (/hi/) of [39] should appear in the surface structure of that relative clause.

2.1.3 *Avoidance of non-restrictive clauses:*

Mukattash (1986) observed that his Arabic speaking learners avoid using non-restrictive clauses, and thus use restrictive clause in wrong contexts:

[40] Ibrahim who brought the computer yesterday is my best friend.

Although the cause of this avoidance is not clear-cut, it may be indirectly ascribed to Arabic interference. The semantic distinctions between restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses in Arabic are not discussed clearly in Arabic. This may lead the Arabic speaking learners to use the restrictive relative clauses in both contexts (cf. example [40] above).

2.1.4 *Use of the possessives with the antecedent:*

Tushyeh (1988) noticed that his Ss sometime use the possessive pronoun with the antecedent:

[41] *His house which he built is large.

This deviation may mainly be attributed to negative transfer from Arabic. Since, contrary to English, in Arabic there is no constraints on the use of possessives with the antecedent.

2.1.5 *Subject verb agreement:* (see also 1.6)

Tushyeh (1988) reported cases in which Arabic speaking learners thought that *who* was always singular (see also Scott & Tucker, 1974) and consequently overgeneralized its use. He also observed that these learners thought that *whom* and *whose* are relative pronouns used in the plural form:

[42] *The people who is talking to each other are friends.

[43] *The men whom are talking are friends.

One can maintain here that this error could be attributed to negative transfer of analogy from the MT since Arabic relative pronouns have one underlying base with phonological differences: (/allathi/ (singular), /allathani/ (dual), /allatheena/ (plural)).

2.2 *Intralingual errors of relative clauses*

2.2.1 *Relative pronoun substitution:*

Arabic speaking learners sometimes do not distinguish between *which* and *who* relatives (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Mukattash, 1986; Kharma, 1987; Tushyeh, 1988). Consider the following example:

[44] *I know a lot of people which differ from those you are talking about.

Moreover, Mukattash (1986) observed that his Ss erroneously avoid using *whose* and thus replace it by an inappropriate relative pronoun. He refers this to two main factors: "(1) the learners' inadequate grasp of the *-s* genitive and the *of*-genitive in English, (2) and to the reason that there is no Arabic relative pronoun that corresponds to whose" (p. 179). However, one can argue here that the Arabic relative pronoun /allathi/ can function as the English relative *whose* (see Wright, 1967, vol. 2:323). Consider the following example:

[45] Arabic sentence	/attabeeb allathi ?ibnahu yadrusu maai rajulun kareemun/
English translation	the physician whose son study with me man generous The physician *whose* son studies with me is a generous man.

2.3 *Structural misrepresentation of relative clauses*

Tushyeh (1988) reported the following deviations:

a. Repetition of the identical NP:

[46] *The knife which he cut with the knife is sharp.

b. Relative clause preposing:

[47] *Susan wrote a letter to the girl never answered it.

c. Incorrect word order:

[48] *The knife he cut with which is sharp.

d. Missing of the antecedent:

[49] *Who studies for the examination succeeds.

e. Use of the definite article instead of the relative pronoun:

[50] *The man the came here is rich.

f. Use of personal pronouns instead of the relative pronoun:

[51] *I get a friend he speaks Spanish.

g. Use of "all what " for "all that " (Kharma, 1987):

[52] *This is all what I know about this question.

2.4 *Simplification strategy in using relative clauses*

2.4.1 *Preposition omission in the indirect object position:*

Tushyeh (1988) reports that his Ss omit the preposition in the indirect object position:

[53] *I saw the girl who I sent a letter.

He maintains that this deviation is a type of negative transfer from MT "since in Arabic there are no prepositions in the indirect object positions" (p.73). One can concede here that contrary to what Tushyeh indicates, preposition can appear in the indirect object position in Arabic. The Arabic translation of the relative clause of [53] above is: /allati ?rsaltu ?ilayha khitaban/. The preposition here is /?ilayha/ (to her). If the deviation in the relative clause of [53] is "who I sent to her a letter", then it can be regarded as an MT interference. One can then argue here that the omission of the preposition in [53] is a matter of simplification strategy.

Other simplification strategies are as follows:

a. Simple sentences instead of relative clauses (Tushyeh, 1988):

[54] *The son of the teacher is named Ali.

b. A sequence of two sentences instead of relative clauses (Tushyeh, 1988):

[55] *Samir is an engineer. He came to visit us.

c. Conjoined sentences instead of relative clauses (Kaplan, 1967; Tushyeh, 1988):

(1) by using a coordinator (and, or, but):

[56] *The two boys are polite and I talked to them.

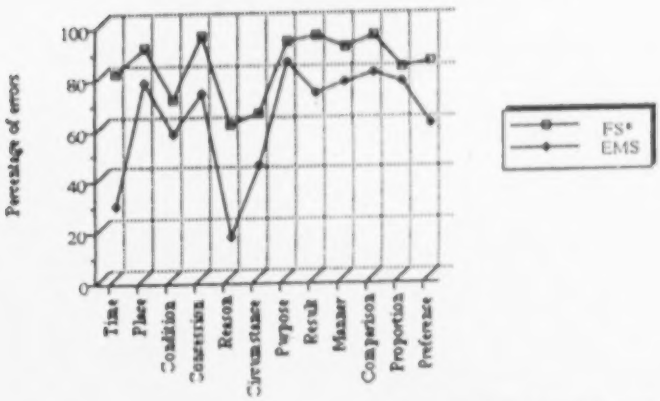
(2) by using a subordinator (after, when, because):

[57] *The man bought the car because he is rich.

3. ADVERBIAL CLAUSES

Noor (1987) investigated the ability of Saudi university students to manipulate English adverbial clauses. His findings resulted in a rank order of these clauses and of the learners' other areas of difficulty while constructing such clauses. He found that adverbial clauses of *comparison*, *purpose*, *result*, *concession*, and *manner* were, respectively, the most problematic clauses for the Ss (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: **Order of difficulty of English adverbial clauses for Saudi learners** (Noor, 1987)



*FS=Freshers, EMS=English Major Students

Noor relates this result to linguistic factors namingly: the overlaps that occur in the concept of the subordinators which introduce these clauses. He also noticed that errors in verbs, errors in subordinators, and deletion of redundant words were, respectively, the most often deviated from English while constructing adverbial clauses.

3.1 *Verbal errors*

Noor (1987) marked that the most frequent verb errors in constructing English adverbial clauses by his Ss was in the omission of the copula and the auxiliary (cf. 1.5.1 & 1.5.2). Consider the following example:

[58] *We punish him unless he works harder.

Mis forming of the finite verb (e.g., drived, didn't bought; cf. 1.5.5) was also reported.

3.2 *Subordinating Conjunctions*

Two types of errors were reported here: subordinator selection and subordinator position in the structure.

3.2.1 *Subordinator selection:*

The wrong selection of the subordinator may mainly be due to the reason that the Ss have not acquired or internalised the concept of the subordinator concerned (Noor, 1987; Abu Gharara h, 1989):

[59] *Nabeel disappointed his teacher so that he didn't answer well the last exam.

In example [59] above, the Ss were asked to choose the appropriate subordinator (three subordinators were provided, *so that*, *in that*, and *although*; see Noor, 1987:171).

3.2.2 *Subordinator position in the sentence:*

Mukattash (1986) observed that his Ss instead of introducing the temporal adverbial clause with a subordinator, they produced the clause in the following structure: subject NP + subordinator + pronominal reflex of the subject NP + predicate:

[60] *The learner when he becomes old, his memory span is increased.

Mukattash considers this type of error as an "L1 induced error" (p.199). However, one can admit here that this is not typically the case since in Arabic, as in English, temporal propositions, which are introduced by subordinators, can either occur initially or finally in the sentence (Wright 1967, vol. 2:292-94). The error in [60] above then can be attributed mainly to a strategy adopted by Arabic speaking learners in processing such clauses namingly: semantic strategy or topicalization. Here the Ss may move the subject NP (*the learner* in [60]) to initial position as the topic of the sentence (see Noor to appear).

3.3 *Deletion of redundant words*

Noor (1987) observed that Arabic speaking learners failed to delete the redundant words while constructing English adverbial clauses. For example, the learner was given the following two sentences and was asked to construct an adverbial clause by using the appropriate subordinator provided:

[61] I left early. I hoped to catch the plane. (so that, if)

Almost 80% of the responses were as follows:

[62] *I left early so that I hoped to catch the plane.

4. SENTENCE STRUCTURE

Scott and Tucker (1974) marked that his Ss used erroneously redundant subjects and objects in main clauses, relative clauses, and after the infinitives. Errors in misplacing adverbs and particles, and misordering adjectives were also reported in the literature (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Mukattash, 1986; Noor, 1987). Other deviations reported in the literature are as follows:

4.1 *Subject repetition*

This error type involves the repetition in a pronominal form of the subject NP in non-embedded declarative sentences (Mukattash, 1986):

[63] *The computer it can arrange your work better.

The error type in [63] above does not reflect the structure of Arabic and, therefore, could be a performance error. The learner here may avoid repeating the subject and instead would replace it by the appropriate pronoun.

4.2 *Word order*

The literature reported reversing the word order of the structure in the following situations: (1) reversing the order of the subject for the question word (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Asfoor, 1978, Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Al-Muarik, 1982; Tushyeh, 1988):

[64] *She knows who are they.

(2) in forming *wh*-question; where the obligatory inversion of the auxiliary and the subject NP is absent (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Mukattash, 1981; Al-Muarik, 1982):

[65] *When our friends will arrive?

and (3) in constructing certain statements; for example Asfoor (1978) noticed that his Ss reversed the order of subject-verb (see also Abu Ghararah, 1989):

[66] *He was so happy with his engagement to Sue, and so I was.

One can argue here that these types of errors are instances of negative transfer from Arabic. However, for type (2), i.e., the subject NP, L1 acquisition literature reports similar to this kind of deviation (see Corder, 1974; Dulay & Burt, 1974; Richards, 1974).

4.3 *Mis use of the complementizer 'that'*

Mukattash (1986) observed that Arabic speaking learners use erroneously the complementizer *that* in sentence initial position (particularly in the contexts of definitions) (p. 198):

[67] *Weak version of CA (contrastive analysis): that CA can't predict errors of the foreign students.

One can concede that this may mainly be due to negative transfer from MT. The non-embedded declarative sentences in Arabic may be optionally preceded by the complementizer /ʔinna/, which corresponds to the complementizer *that* in English. Consider the following example:

[68] Arabic sentence /ʔinna - samaaʔa safiyatun/
English translation COMP - the sky clear

5. ARTICLES

The literature reported deviations in the use of both indefinite and definite articles.

5.1 *The indefinite articles*

Three types of errors were observed here.

5.1.1 *Deletion of the indefinite article:*

The most noticeable error in using the indefinite article by Arabic speaking learners was in deleting the indefinite article (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Willcott, 1974; Asfoor, 1978; Beck, 1979; Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Kharma, 1981; El-Sayed, 1983;

Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983; Meziani, 1984; Kayed, 1985; Abu Ghararah, 1989):

[69] *I gave him sheet of paper.

[70] *You are honest man.

This type of error could be attributed to negative transfer from the MT since Arabic marks nouns as definite or indefinite by the presence or absence of the article.

As an example of intralingual error, Asfoor (1978) noticed that his Ss dropped the indefinite article before numerals or adjectives to imply plurality:

[71] *Few days ago I received a letter from Omar.

5.1.2 *Indefinite for definite:*

Al-Kasimi et al. (1979) reported that some of their Arabic speaking learners use indefinite articles for definite articles:

[72] *London is a capital of England.

This may mainly be attributed to hyper correction the learners follow with this structure.

5.1.3 *Redundancy of the indefinite articles:*

Scott and Tucker (1974) observed that their Ss used erroneously the indefinite article *'a'* with non-count nouns (see also Meziani, 1984):

[73] *He accepted without a joy.

Furthermore, Al-Kasimi et al. (1979) noticed the redundancy of *'a'* with proper nouns:

[74] *His house is very close to a river called a Thames.

5.2 *The definite articles*

5.2.1 *Redundancy of the indefinite article*

The literature reported redundant use of *'the'* instead of Ø article with: (1) proper nouns (Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Kharma, 1981; Abu Ghararah, 1989):

[75] *Last year I went to the New York.

with (2) countable nouns (Asfoor, 1978; Kharma, 1981; El-Sayed, 1983; Meziani, 1984; Kayed, 1985):

[76] *We go to the school everyday.

with (3) non-countable nouns (Meziani, 1984):

[77] *to see what's the wrong with it.

The error types (2) and (3) above could be attributed to negative transfer from MT since Arabic marks the nouns in the linguistic contexts of these examples as definite nouns. The error in type (1), however, is not an interlingual error.

6. PREPOSITIONS

Al-Haidari (1984) and Meziani (1984) found that English prepositions of *recipient/target*, *time*, *destination*, and *cause/purpose* were, respectively, the most problematic for the Arabic speaking learners.

The types of errors the literature reported here were deletion, substitution, and redundancy use of English prepositions.

6.1 *Preposition deletion*

Mehdi (1981) reported that his Arabic speaking learners attempted to establish a one-to-one correspondence between English and Arabic prepositions. This led them to omit or select wrongly (see 6.2) the prepositions from the English structure when equivalents were not existed in Arabic (see also Scott & Tucker, 1974; Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Meziani, 1984). Consider the following examples:

[78] *That man over there Ø the black hair is my uncle.

[79] *One neighbour explained Ø them.

6.2 *Preposition substitution*

The most common error in using prepositions the literature reports is the wrongly substitution of the preposition (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Asfoor, 1978; Beck, 1979; Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Mehdi, 1981; El-Sayed, 1983; Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983; Al-Haidari, 1984; Meziani, 1984; Abu Gharara, 1989). Consider the following examples:

[80] *I picked up your umbrella on mistake.

[81] *We went home in the train yesterday.

These errors could mainly be attributed to negative transfer from Arabic.

6.3 *Preposition redundancy*

The literature reports redundant use of English prepositions by Arabic speaking learners (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Mehdi, 1981; El-Sayed, 1983; Meziani, 1984; Abu Ghararah, 1989). Consider the following example:

[82] *Get in inside the car.

This type of errors can be attributed to negative transfer from Arabic.

7. CONJUNCTIONS

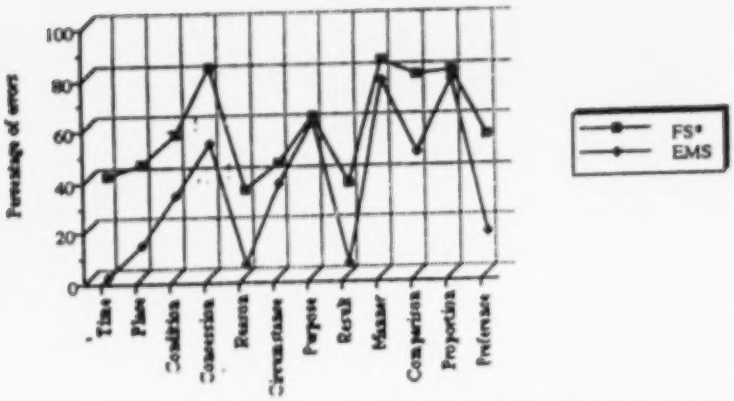
Khered (1984) in attempting to establish an Arab EFL index of development found that the Arabic speaking learners of English rely heavily on sentence coordination in initial stage of development; subordination, in the intermediate stage; clause length, in the advanced stage.

7.1 *Subordinators' order of difficulty*

The most problematic subordinators were the *manner* ones (Noor, 1987). The *proportion* and *concession* subordinators were also reported problematic for the Arabic speaking learners (Bacha & Hanania, 1980; Noor, 1987). Figure 2 below represents a rank order of difficulty of the subordinators.

In 3.2 above, we have discussed the types of errors Arabic speaking learners encounter in using subordinating conjunctions which introduce adverbial clauses. The literature reports an investigation of the acquisition of temporal conjunctions (Noor, 1993). The results show that Arabic speaking learners encounter difficulty in processing sequence conjunctions in which the situation in the main clause occurs after that in the temporal clause. In drawing an order of acquisition of these conjunctions, Noor found that *whenever*, *directly*, and *now that* (which indicates simultaneity) were, respectively, the most problematic conjunctions for the Arabic speaking learners. For the position of the temporal clause in the sentence, the results

Figure 2: **Order of difficulty of English subordinating conjunction for Saudi learners** (Noor, 1987)



*FS=Freshers, EMS=English Major Students

demonstrate that Arabic speaking learners performed better in temporal clauses which occur initially in the sentence than those which occur medially. He refers this result mainly to a strategy adopted by these learners. This strategy indicates that the learners concentrate more on the conjunctions to understand the temporal relations between the two situations in the sentence, which led them to encounter fewer errors on sentences where the temporal clause occurs initially.

Noor (1991) investigated how Arabic speaking learners process temporal relations which are expressed by temporal conjunctions. He found that his Ss did not show any significant difference between logical[2] or arbitrary[3] ordered sequences. However, the study demonstrated that non-congruent ordered sequences were problematic for his learners, i.e., the Arabic speaking learners tended to perform better on sentences in which sequence of events or situations coincide with events occurrence. In other words, the results showed, as some L1 acquisition studies indicate (e.g., Keller-Cohn, 1974; French & Brown, 1977; Natsopoulos & Abadzi, 1986), that these learners tended to use the order of mention strategy in their understanding of the sequence task.

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8. CONCLUSION

The paper has reviewed the literature of the studies that investigated the processing of English syntactic structures by Arabic speaking learners. The problematic areas were identified and sources for these areas were discussed. Arguments concerning certain sources, particularly those of negative transfer or interference, were re-tackled and suggestions were presented. The paper has shown some interesting findings. The most common source of these deviations is the influence of the native language. This may support the current L2 thinking which emphasises the important role the mother tongue can play in understanding the processes of SLA (see for example: Odlin, 1989; Gass & Selinker, 1992; Foster-Cohen, 1993, Noor, 1994). The review has also shown that the Arabic speaking learners in processing English syntactic structures adopt certain strategies similar to those of L1 learners; e.g. simplification, overgeneralization, etc. This similarity between L1 and L2 acquisition gives an evidence to the natural sequence of development (or L2 = L1 hypothesis; cf. Burt & Dulay, 1980).

Notes:

[1] The term 'Arabic' in this paper refers to Standard Arabic; and henceforth whenever the word Arabic appears in the text it means Standard Arabic.

[2] Where the first event (in the sentence) would be a reasonable prior event, e.g.: After Ann fills the bottle, she feeds the baby.

[3] Where the relation between the events is pragmatically implausible, e.g.: Ann fills the bottle before she closes the purse.

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